The Ethic of Jesus 9-18-60
Impossible - Possibility

DURING HIS SHORT MINISTRY ON EARTH, JESUS OF NAZARETH, ON FREQUENT OCCASIONS DEALT WITH THE BEHAVIOR OF HIS LISTENERS AND COMPANIONS. I AM SURE YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT AND THAT YOU HAVE HEARD IT QUOTED, DISCUSSED AND PREACHED ENUMERABLE TIMES. CHRISTIAN MEN THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE SEARCHED THIS COLLECTION OF ETHICAL STATEMENTS FOR SOME CLUE, OR BASIS UPON WHICH THEY COULD CONSTRUCT A CODE OF BEHAVIOR--A WAY OF LIVING THAT IS TRUE TO THE TEACHINGS OF CHRIST --A CHRISTIAN LIFE. AS YOU WELL KNOW THE RESULTS OF THIS SEARCH HAVE BEEN LARGE IN VOLUME BUT QUITE SHORT IN QUALITY. ATTEMPTS TO INTREPRET THE ETHICAL DEMANDS OF JESUS INTO A WAY OF LIFE HAVE PRODUCED A BROAD RANGE OF RESULTS FROM SELF DENIAL TO SELF INDULGENCE. LEO TOLSTOY TRANSLATED THE TEACHINGS OF CHRIST INTO A PHILOSOPHY OF COMPLETE NON RESISTANCE, AN ABHORANCE OF ANY TYPE OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE--EVEN TO THE POINT WHERE HE WAS WILLING TO DO AWAY WITH ALL PENAL INSTITUTIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS MOTIVATED THE ROMAN EMPEROR CONSTATINE TO STRIVE FOR MILITARY CONQUEST OF THE KNOWN WORLD FOR CHRISTIANITY AFTER HE HAD FORCED THE RELIGION OF JESUS ON THE ENTIRE EMPIRE. THE DEMAND TO SELL ALL YOU HAVE AND GIVE TO THE POOR WAS AT THE BASIS OF THE RIGOROUS 4th CENTURY ASCETICISM THAT GRADUALLY EVOLVED INTO THE ELABORATE SYSTEM OF MEDIEVAL MONASTICISM. THE TEACHINGS OF THE SAME MAN, OUR LORD, HAVE PROMPTED MEN SUCH AS ALBE T SCHWEITZER, BILLY GRAHAM AND POPE JOHN THE 23 TO DO THE THINGS THEY HAVE DONE. CHRIST'S TEACHINGS HAVE MEANT STRICT LEGALISM FOR SOME,

ABSTINENCE FROM TABACCO AND ALCHOLHOL. IT CAUSED A CHILDHOOD FRIEND TO BLANDLY STATE I WAS GOING TO HELL FOR CALLING HER FOOLIST BECAUSE JESUS SAID YOU SHOULDN'T CALL ANYONE A FOOL--~~XXM-STUPID-BUT-NOT-FOOLISH~~. IN SHORT THE ETHICAL DMANDS OF JESUS HAVE BEEN INTERPRETED DIFFERENTLY A MULTITUDE OF TIMES AND INEVITABLY HAVE BEEN ABUSED ON MOST OF THESE OCCASIONS. BECAUSE OF THIS I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT CHRISTIANS IF THEY ARE TO BE CHRISTIANS, MUST REEXAMINE THESE TEACHINGS, MUST ATTEMPT TO CONSIDER THEM INTELLIGENTLY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT JESUS MEANT WHEN HE SAID THEM BEFORE CREATING THEIR OWN CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE.

EVERY HISTORICAL ATTEMPT, AND CONTEMPORARY ATTEMPT, TO CREATE A PATTERN FOR GOOD LIVING FROM THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS IS GUILTY OF THE SAME GRAVE AND FUNDAMENTAL ERROR. JESUS WAS NOT A SOCIAL REFORMER, A FIRST CENTURY DO GOODER, HE WAS NOT A POLITICAL REVOLUTIONIST, OR A MORALISTIC PURITAN--HE WAS THE INCARNATE SON OF GOD. THUSLY HE SIMPLY DIDN'T DEAL IN SOCIAL OR MORAL TERMS BUT COMPLETELY IN THE REALM OF RELIGION;--THE SPIRITUAL, JESUS WAS CONCERNED PRIMARILY WITH RELATIONS BETWEEN GOD AND MAN, AND NOT MAN WITH MAN. AS THE INCARNATE SON OF GOD HIS PRESENCE IN HISTORY IS THE BRIDGE NOT PRIMARILY BETWEEN MAN AND MAN BUT GOD AND MAN. GEOMETRICALLY HE SPOKE IN TERMS ONLY OF A VERTICAL PLANE NOT A HORIZONTAL ONE.

A CLOSE EXAMINATION OF SOME OF JESUS'S DEMANDS SHOWS THEM DRASTICALLY INADEQUATE IN OUR PRESENT SOCIETY--THEY ARE AN IMPOSSIBILITY--AND YET SOMEHOW, A POSSIBILITY.

THEY ARE A LOGICAL ABSURDITY—AND YET THEY CONTAIN ESSENTIAL TRUTH.

BEFORE BEGINNING A DISCUSSION OF A FEW SPECIFIC DEMANDS OF JESUS WE MUST CONSIDER THE EVER PRESENT UNDERLYING FACT OF MAN'S BASIC SINFULNESS. THIS IS THE SUBJECT THAT VALIDATES ALL THAT JESUS SAID AND AT THE SAME TIME IF DENIED MAKES ALL HE SAID QUITE RIDICULOUS.

MAN IS SINFUL! THIS STATEMENT HAS VASCILLATED BETWEEN THEOLOGICAL PROMINENCE AND ABSCURITY EVER SINCE THE SERMON THE MT. WAS FIRST UTTERED. WITHOUT FAIL MEN ATTEMPT TO IGNORE THE TERRIFYING FACT OF THEIR OWN HOPELESS SINFULNESS. THE PERIOD OF THE ENLIGHTMENT THAT FOLLOWED ON THE HEELS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION PRODUCED A FALSE OPTIMISM ABOUT HUMANITY FROM WHICH WE ARE JUST RECOVERING. PHILOSOPHERS, POLITICAL SCIENTISTS AND IN THEIR TURN THEOLOGIANS OF THE LIBERAL SCHOOL NAIVELY ASSERTED MAN'S BASIC GOODNESS. IF ENOUGH EDUCATION WOULD BE AVAILABLE, AND THE GENERAL ENVIRONMENT COULD BE IMPROVED EVERTHING WOULD BE ROSY. MAN BY HIS OWN SOCIAL EFFORTS COULD ULTIMATELY PERFECT HIMSELF. THE FIRST WORLD WAR ARMISTISE PROMPTED AN UNHEARD OF WAVE OF OPTIMISM AND GOOD WILL. SURELY THIS WAS THE WAR TO END ALL WARS. SURELY MAN HAD FINALLY LEARNED A LESSON, AND HAVING LEARNED THE LESSON WOULD TURN TO PRO-DUCING A PEACEFUL, PERFECT HUMANITY. A QUICK GLANCE AT A NEWS PAPER IS SUFFICIENT TO SHOW THAT MEN HAVEN'T LEARNED AND NEVER WILL LEARN--BECAUSE THEY ARE MEN AND AS

men sinful. the question arises as to the specific definition of man's sinfulness, OR ORIGINAL SIN AS IT IS VOICED IN THE REFORMED TRADITION, AND ALTHOUGH I HAVEN'T THE TIME TO ELABORATE WE CAN DESCRIBE THIS SINFULNESS AS SELFISHNESS, SELF - ISH - NESS. SELF CENTERDNESS, PRIDE, EGOCENTRICITY ARE OTHER WAYS OF SAYING.

CHRISTIAN TEACHERS SINCE CHRIST HAVE POUNDED AWAY AT THIS FACT. THE APOSTLE PAUL, ST. AUGUSTINE, MARTIN LUTHER, JOHN CALVIN ALL SAW THE SHADOW OF SELFISH PRIDE LURKING BEHIND THE BEHAVIOR OF EVERY MAN THAT EVER LIVED. THE ASSERTION OF CHRISTIANITY ~~XXXXX~~ THAT MAN IS SINFUL, THAT HE UNCONSCIOUSLY IS MOTIVATED BY HIS EGOCENTRICITY IS STRONGLY SUPPORTED BY MODERN PSYCHOLOGY. THE RESPECTIVE SCHOOLS OF KARL JUNG AND SIGMUND FREUD STARTLED THE ACADEMIC WORLD WITH THEIR THEORIED OF MAN'S TENDENCIES TO DESTROY, HIS INABILITY TO EXERCISE RATIONAL CONTROL OVER CERTAIN BEHAVIOR ORGINATING IN THE UNCONCIOUS, THE INHERENT EVIL THAT UNDERLIES ALL HUMAN NATURE. ALTHOUGH THEY WOULD FIND IT DISTASTEFUL TO BE A PART OF ANY SUCH COMPARISON THEIR STATEMENTS ARE REMARKABLY LIKE PAUL WHEN HE SAID--"THE GOOD THAT I WOULD I DO NOT--THE EVIL THAT I WOULD NOT THAT I DO," OR LATER TO MARTIN LUTHER WHEN HE REALIZED THAT EVERY SOUL IS INCURVATUS SE--CURVED IN UPON ITSELF--OR EVEN TO JOHN CALVIN WHERE HE SEES MAN AS A MASS OF PERDITION.

THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS ARE AIMED DIRECTLY AT THE FACT THAT TO BE HUMAN IS TO BE A SINNER. MAN'S EVERY ACT IS MOTIVATED BY REGARD FOR HIS SELF. PHARISEE AND DISCIPLE, MURDERER AND PASTOR ARE GUILTY OF THE SAME INHERENT FELONY EGOCENTRICITY.

THERE ARE THREE PARTICULAR DEMANDS QUOTED IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW THAT I WISH TO DISCUSS THIS MORNING--IN LIGHT OF WHAT I HAVE SAID ABOUT THE TRANSCENDENCE OF THESE DEMANDS AND MAN'S SINFUL NATURE. THE DEMANDS ARE CONCERNED WITH SELF PRESERVATION, MATERIAL POSSESSIONS, AND PRIDE IN GOOD WORKS.

EARLY IN HIS SCHOOL YEAR A CHILD LEARNS THE BASIC IMPULSES OR INSTINCTS THAT ARE ACTIVE IN ALL ANIMAL LIFE, INCLUDING MAN, --AND AT THE HEAD OF THIS LIST IS SELF PRESERVATION. NOTHING IS MORE BASIC OR FUNDAMENTAL TO MAN'S NATURE THAN THE WILL TO LIVE, NOTHING AS DRAMATIC AS A MAN FIGHTING FOR HIS LIFE--BE IT AGAINST AN ENEMY OR A CANCER. THIS IS A <u>REALITY</u>, AS REALISTIC AS WE CAN BE, A REALITY INSTILLED IN US ALL BY OUR CREATOR. AND YET IN THE SERMON ON THE MT. JESUS SAID --"DO NOT BE ANXIOUS ABOUT YOUR LIFE, WHAT YOU SHALL EAT AND WHAT YOU SHALL DRINK, NOR ABOUT YOUR BODY, WHAT YOU SHALL PUT ON." IF THIS IS TO BE CONSIDERED AN ETHICAL IMPERATIVE LIFE AS WE KNOW IT WOULD BE AN IMPOSSIBLITY.

MORE PROBABLY, HAD MEN UNANIMOUSLY EMBRACED THIS, LIFE WOULD BE NONEXISTANT. WHAT THEN DID JESUS MEAN WHEN HE SAID TAKE NO THOUGHT FOR YOUR LIFE? HE WAS STRIKING HARD AT THE VERY BASIS OF OUR SELF LOVE, AT OUR SINFUL SELFISHNESS. TO BE TOTALLY UNCONCERNED ABOUT OUR LIVES IS AN IMPOSSIBILITY--CHRIST'S UNCOMPROMISING DEMAND SEEMS QUITE FOOLISH. AND YET ISN'T THERE SOMETHING DEEPLY BEAUTIFUL AND ESSENTIALLY TRUE IN THIS DEMAND--WOULDN'T IT BE REALLY CHRSITIAN IF WE COULD REALIZE OUR ~~KEENX~~ HOPELESSNESS, AND THROUGH THIS REALIZATION SUBDUE SOMEWHAT THE AUTOMATIC ASSERTIONS OF OUR SELVES.

A STOCK REPLY IS THAT THIS DEMAND WAS LEGITIMATE AND A POSSIBILITY IN AGARIAN PALESTINE--BUT CAN BE DISCARDED BY 20th CENTURY AMERICANS AS --ANTIQUATED AND UNREALISTIC. TO THE CONTRARY, JESUS WAS/TO ALL HUMANITY, IN ALL AGES TO Pleading ~~PREACHING~~! LOOK AT THEMSELVES OBJECTIVELY, TO REALIZE HOW THEIR BEHAVIOR IS ABORTED BY THIS INNER SELFISHNESS, --AND TO DISCOVER HOW DESPERATELY THEY NEED THE FORGIVENESS OF THEIR CREATOR.

IN THE SAME SERMON JESUS TOLD HIS LISTNERS NOT TO LAY UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES ON EARTH, WHERE MOTH AND RUST CONSUME AND WHERE THIEVES BREAK IN AND STEAL. DOES THIS MEAN THAT IN LIGHT OF THE MOTHS, RUST AND THIEVES WE SHOULD REFRAIN FROM SAVING MONEY, THAT JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER WAS THE MOST HENIOUS OF THE

WORLD'S SINNERS. OF COURSE NOT! HERE JESUS WAS DIRECTING HIS ADMONISHINGS AT ONE OF THE MOST NATURAL MEANS OF ASSERTING AND EXTENDING THE SELF THROUGH POSSESSIONS AND PROPERTY. WHEN MATERIAL POSSESSIONS BECOME AN OBSESSION--A VERY COMMON AILMENT WITH SO VERY MANY OF US,--WE ARE ALLOWING OURSELF TO HAVE ITS WAY, THROUGH SELF EXPANSION. WEALTH IS NOT EVIL IN ITSELF, BUT AS AN END, THE OBJECT OF THE LOVE THAT BELONGS ONLY TO ~~GOOD~~ God--IT IS QUITE EVIL. YOU SEE, JESUS WAS NOT ATTEMPTING TO ORGANIZE A COMMUNITY OF POVERTY STRICKEN, HUNGRY BUT PIOUS CHRSITIANS, HE WAS CONCERNED SOLELY WITH THE IIDIVIDUAL AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO GOD.

IN THE 23rd CHAPTER OF THE BOOK OF MATTHEW, JESUS IS MOST CLEAR ON THE SUBJECT OF SELFISH PRIDE AND HOW IT COLORS ALL OUR BEHAVIOUR. IT IS HERE THAT HIS WARNINGS AND SCORN STRIKE AT THE MOST SUBTLE WAY MEN GO ABOUT ADORNING AND EXTENDING THEIR EGO--THROUGH GOOD DEEDS. TALKING ABOUT SCRIBES AND PHARISEES HE HARSHLY POINTED OUT THAT THEY DO ALL THEIR DEEDS TO BE SEEN BY MEN, AND LOVE THE PLACES OF HONOR AT BANQUETS AND FEASTS. THE COMMON CONCEPTION OF THE PHARISEES AND SCRIBES IS USUALLY ONE DISTORTED BY THE IMAGINATION. THESE WERE NOT BAD MEN IN THE PUBLIC EYES-THEY WERE THE RELIGIOUS ARISTOCRACY, THOSE WHO KEPT THE JEWISH

LAW TO THE HILT: THEY WERE THE GROUP THAT GAVE MOST TO CHARITY,--SPONSORED THE SUMMER CAMP FOR UNDERPRIVILEGED CHILDREN, THEY WERE PERHAPS THE MOST APPROVED OF GROUP IN SOCIETY. TO THEM AND ALL OF US WHO OCCUPY SIMILAR STATUS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY JESUS ISSUED THE MOST HARD HITTING WARNING IMAGINABLE. IT APPLIES TO US AS A NATION, A COMMUNITY AND PERSONALLY. FOREIGN AID WHEN MOTIVATED BY A DESIRE FOR NATIONAL ESTEEM IS WRONG, AND ON THE INDIVUDAL SCALE: MAKING THE LARGEST DONATION TO THE COMMUNITY CHEST IN ORDER TO BE RECOGNIZED AS A REAL PERSON BY OUR NEIGHBORS IS <u>WRONG</u>! HOW CUNNING OUR SELF OPERATES EVEN TO THE POINT WHERE THE SUPPOSED GOOD WE DO IS TEMPERED BY THAT ONE DESIRE TO BE SEEN AS A GOOD PERSON. HERE ESPECIALLY JESUS DEMANDS SIMPLY DON'T SEEM TO MEET THE SITUATION. IF THIS IS ALL SO--WHY BOTHER DOING GOOD AT ALL? BUT YET IT REMAINS A LINGERING POSSIBLITY.

JESUS'S ETHICAL DEMANDS ARE TRANSCENDENT, AS GOD TRANSCENDS MAN, AS THE ETERNAL TRANCENDS THE TEMPORAL--SO THE ETHIC OF JESUS TRANSCENDS PETTY HUMAN RELATIONS. OUR FIRST CONCERN WHEN CONSIDERING HIS ADMONISHONS IS WITH THE GREAT GAP BETWEEN GOD AND MAN, THE RESULT OF OUR SINFUL NATURE.

A FEW MORE BRIEF EXAMPLES SHOULD BE SUFFICIENT TO DEMONSTRATE MY POINT. ONE ONE OCCASION JESUS SAID YOU MUST HATE MOTHER AND FATHER IN ORDER TO FULLY

LOVE GOD--SURELY THIS IS NOT A POSSIBLITY. OR ANOTHER OCCASION HE SAID ANGER IS AS EVIL AS MURDER AND LUST AS ADULTERING. THE SWISS THEOLOGIAN--KARL BARTH HAS SAID OF JESUS' ETHIC ON THE SURFACE "THAT IT IS NOT APPLICABLE TO THE PROBLEMS OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY OR ANY CONCEIVABLE SOCIETY." SURELY WE ARE NOT TO BECOME VAGRANTS XXXXX CARING NOTHING ABOUT FOOD AND CLOTHING AND HATING OUR PARENTS IN ORDER TO LIVE A CHRISTIAN LIFE. THROUGH THIS MESS OF AN IMPOSSIBLE ETHIC COMES JESUS' PLEA--TO SIMPLY REALIZE OUR PLIGHT THIS IS THE POSSIBILITY. SEEK AND YE SHALL FIND: ASK AND IT SHALL BE OPENED UNTO YOU. THE ULTIMATE CHRISTIAN ETHICAL OBLIGATION IS TO FACE UP TO OUR HELPLESS SITUATION AND INSTEAD OF FURTHER GRATIFYING OUR BLEMISHED EGOS, TO TURN TO THE ONLY HAVEN WE HAVE OUR ONLY POSSIBLITY OF A FORGIVING HEAVENLY FATHER. AMEN

DESCEND ON US O LORD, INSTILL IN US THY SAVING GRACE, HELP US TO OVERCOME OUR SINFUL SELVES THAT WE MAY BETTER SERVE THEE. AMEN

BENEDICTION

NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE TO KEEP YOU FROM FALLING AND TO PRESENT YOU WITHOUT BLEMISH BEFORE THE PRESENCE OF HIS GLORY WITH REJOICING, TO THE ONLY GOD, OUR SAVIOR THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, BE GLORY, MAJESTY, DOMINION AND AUTHORITY, BEFORE ALL TIME AND NOW AND FOREVER AMEN

Prayer

Our God and Father, humbly we approach thy presence, as a servant approaches his master and yet in theknowledge that in thy presence we find our strength and refuge. O thou well spring from which all human existence flows, guiet our hearts that we may not only hear but respond to thy still, small voice. help us to cast out the multitude of human trivialities that so burden our minds and that are so unappropriate in thy presence.

Forgive us, our F ther, for daily offending thee.

~~For doing things we ought not~~

~~for thinking things~~

for making our lives revolve around self

for spiritual pride. —

We are thankful

for undeserved blessings

miracle of human birth and growth

minds capable of reason

world balanced perfectly, nature

for church teachers, preachers individual

right to wroship, help us to respect and preserve not frivolously waste.

Thank you

miracle of Jesus Christ etc.
Guidance for our leaders
national
international
our lives correct decisions etc.

Thank you for assurance of pardon, in deep asw and humility we ask all this.

Amen

UA3-4545

Be with
-the sick, ~~needy~~
needy
down trodden
people in the congo
Cuba
-grace for our enemies

- we sorely need
- guide posts